



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

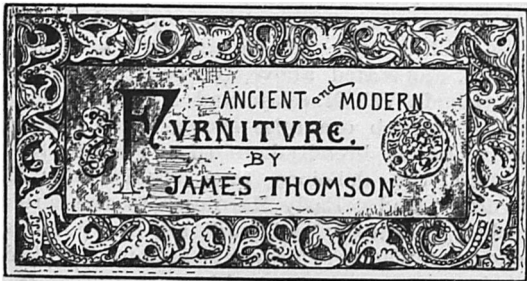
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



A SERIES OF ARTICLES—NUMBER FIVE.

## THE ORNAMENT.

As far back in antiquity as investigation has to us revealed, will be found in man, however rude or uncultivated, an innate love for ornament. An intense delight in color is noticeable alike in the rude savage and the cultivated Hellenic Greek of the remote past. The primitive races covered their weapons of warfare with ornamentation suggested by the simple natural forms they found growing around them. This being the case, it is, therefore, not surprising when we find the important point gained—*furniture* an accomplished fact—attempts should be made to improve it by the addition of ornament. We can imagine the initial attempts childish and crude, at first the sharp edge softened, the slice taken off the corner to render the part less sharp and threatening to comfort. Braces are applied to strengthen the structure, this again grows into the molded arch, or the rude incised cutting still further enriched by the addition of color eventually grows into the more satisfying carving in relief. The arts of the metal worker are drawn upon to furnish the strap hinges to strengthen and further beautify the door, and so on until the later end of the 14th century is reached, when we find the arts drawn upon to beautify furniture had attained a fair degree of perfection. From that time, as Mrs. Spofford in her charming book on Household Art has put it, "Ornament ran riot, and ended by paying no more attention to rule than we suppose a wild blackberry vine in August pays to geometrical progression."

Enrichments of every possible description have been used in the decoration of furniture. Among the methods employed we may mention carving, gilding, painting and marquetry, an inlay in wood, metals, ivory and precious stones. How much the arts of design are indebted to Oriental taste we may never be able to realize, but certain

it is that the "motifs" for much of our furniture decoration had their origin in the East, notably the marquetry, in the 15th century brought to great perfection by the Venetians, who borrowed the art from Persia or India.

Indeed it has been asserted that the Arabic inscriptions woven into the fabrics from the Orient, became in the hands of European artists what are now known as arabesques.

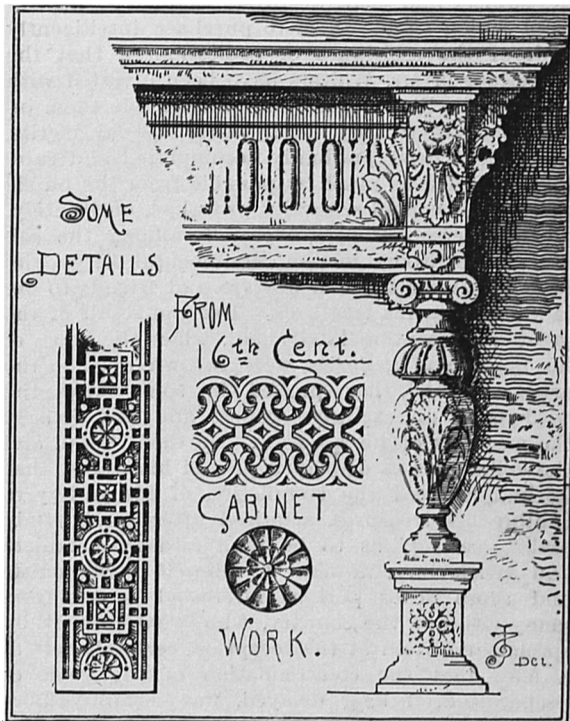
In a review of the different methods employed to beautify furniture, carving should be given a prominent place. In the 14th century Medieval Art reached its greatest perfection, and carved surfaces entered very largely into the scheme of decoration, as applied to interior woodwork and the few pieces of domestic furniture then in use, the designs partook of the architecture of the period, although not in so marked a manner as in the following century when panelling of intricate tracery, after the style of church windows, became a noticeable feature; doors of cabinets, armoirs, etc., being usually decorated in that manner, as were also chests, the design used in some of these being of a most elaborate character, particularly on those used in religious establishments. One of these examples we have in mind being worthy of note. A mass chest, every fraction of an inch of which is enriched with carving of exquisite beauty of design. We show below a door from a cabinet of this time, made, it will be noticed, from a solid board with hinges and lock plate of wrought iron; much of the cabinet work was of the rudest description as regards construction, mere rough carpentry, yet it possessed great dignity and character, the vigorous carving and effective iron work combining to give it a richness of effect wanting in much of the furniture of



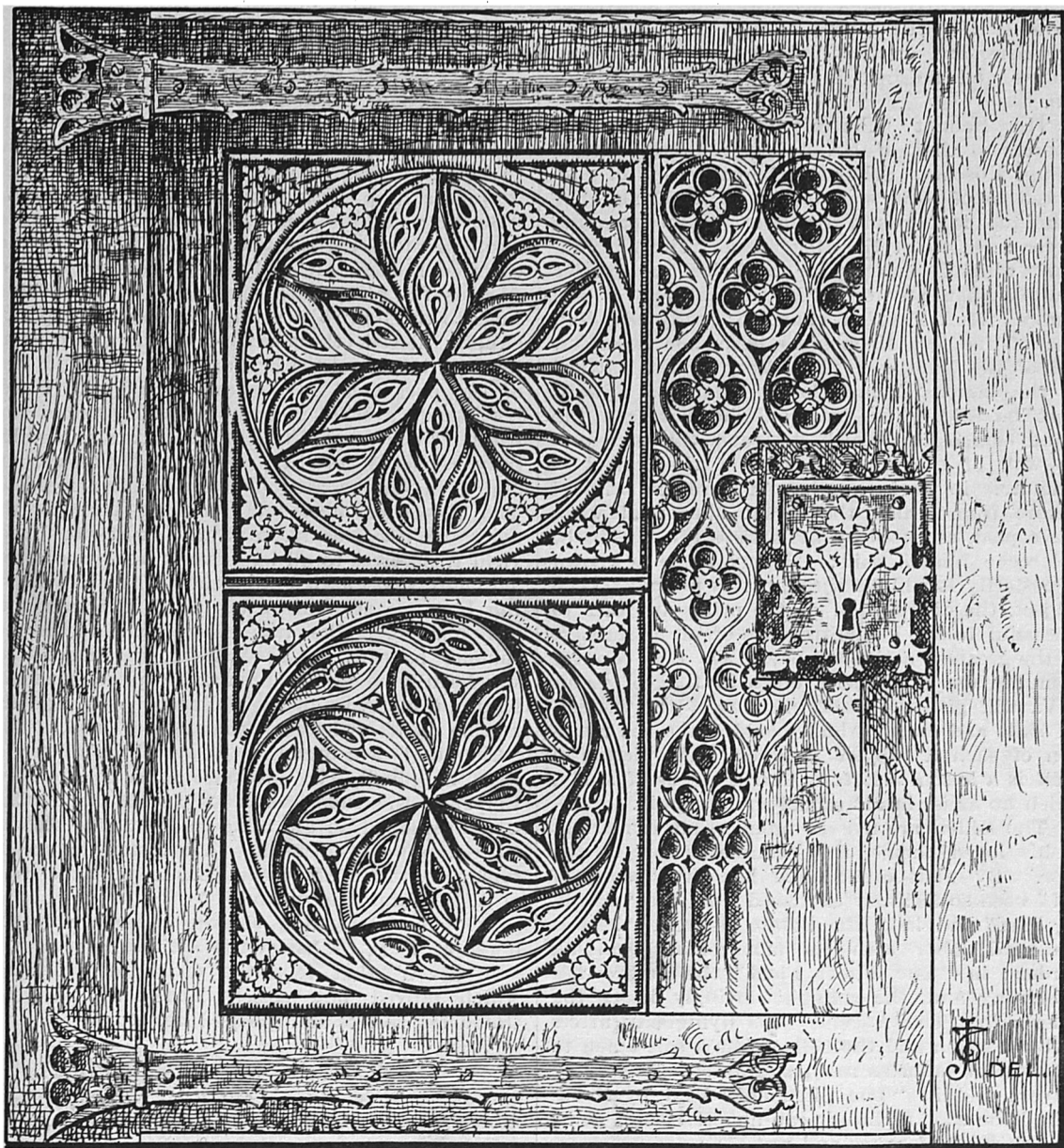
DOOR FROM GERMAN CABINET, SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

more scientific construction. We have also a door from a German cabinet of the 16th century; and this, with its details, will show the change that had taken place in style from that in the previous century: the change was gradual, even as late as the 17th century in England will be found reminiscences of the Gothic; it was never entirely absent. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the sculpture of the time, whether it be in the intentionally contorted and quaint imagery of the Germans, or in the more refined exuberance of the Italians, is the vigor of execution; however rude, it compels admiration by its effectiveness. Attention to the proper disposition of the masses, and play of light and shade, combine to produce this result.

The panels in many of the German cabinets have carving illustrating incidents from Bible history, such as the Baptism of Christ, Life of John the Baptist, etc., treated in a peculiarly droll manner. The Germans seem to have approached even sacred subjects from the humorous



DETAILS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CABINET.



DOOR OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY CABINET.

side. The carving of the English furniture of this time was usually of a very coarse character: strap work, foliage, animals, drapery, being much used during the reign of Elizabeth. The style in the following reign, to which was given the name Jacobean, showed a marked advance, not alone for the rugged honesty of joinery and construction, but for a return to the method of working all carving from the solid surfaces.

The carving was generally of geometric design. The outlines of such pieces as tables or cabinets were clumsy, the trimmings and other supports being huge acorn shapes, and out of all proportion to the structure supported—the chief merit of such work, as we have before remarked, being in the surpassing excellence of construction. A Greek feeling pervades the carving, the running ornaments and foliage recalling the crisp vigor of the thistle acanthus; the designs are not without merit, spreading out in a sort of embroidery over the entire surface. Where the ornament did not take the form of incised cutting, the carving was in very low relief, accented here and there with many sharp cuts and incisions; exaggerated circles or rosettes, like huge sunflowers, stare one in the face. We find them halved and quartered, and dividing honors with the diamond and square.

In the latter end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th, there existed in England a school of carvers of surpassing excellence, prominent among the number being Grinling Gibbons; his specialty seems to have been of the naturalistic order, and of course exercised some influence in shaping the public taste in furniture.

The discovery of the buried cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, with the bringing to light of the evidence of the social life of a people long forgotten, had given a fresh impulse to the taste for the classic forms of antiquity. In France this influence is seen in the perfection of elegance, which was reached in the style of Louis Seize; in England in the styles originated by the brothers John and Robert Adam, and Sir William Chambers. These again had their influence in shaping the style in our own country, to which has been given the name of Colonial. Many excellent examples of mantels and other interior fittings, are to be found in the spacious old mansions, now fast disappearing, with good designs and workmanship in both carving and joinery.